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MODERN STATESMEN—

A SATIRE.

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DELIVERED BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF ALUMNI OF WILLIAMS COLLEGE,
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U. S. A.

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Poor Milton, struggling, old and blind as well,
Invokes a muse to pilot him through hell:
He trembles, hesitates and dreads alone
To tempt the dangers of that torrid zone.
Poor hump-backed Pope, too, when the rage is on,
Stamps, curses, and shouts lustily for John:—
"Awake, my St. John, leave all meaner things
To low Ambition and the pride of kings."
"Hail, muse!" sings Byron, and through clouds and air
Comes robed in melody, the heavenly fair;
Wayward and wicked too, but ah, what fire!
E'en Clio pauses as she takes the lyre,
Awe-struck, then listens to the wondrous strain,
And asks the muse to sing it o'er again.

In lying tales like those about old Troy,
The rape of Helen by a Trojan boy,
The deeds of arms that god-like Hector wrought,
The bloody battles that were never fought,
The heaps of slain that piled that classic ground,
The wrath of Jove that shook the world around;
In tales like these, some better and some worse,
The muse is asked to help the halting verse;
And so, from Homer all the way to Tupper,
Bards whine for muses as dogs whine for supper.

Muses avaunt! hail Truth inspire my song!
Descend from Heaven where thou hast dwelt too long;

On *terra firma*, this, thy whilom seat,
Thy bounding step and glowing face I greet.
When thieves and blockheads in an evil hour,
By fraud and intrigue lift themselves to power,
When hands unhallowed seize the ship of State,
Despoil and rob, then leave her to her fate,
Eternal Truth 'tis thine to tell the tale.
Aye, tell and publish to each whispering gale,
That Vengeance, hearing, may apply the rod
And prove herself the minister of God!
Fools in thy dialect are fools, no more,
No less, however much thy victims roar
And tender tempting bribes to spare the lash
Which burns and scorches like the lightning's flash.
Thy sister Wisdom follows in thy train
And Folly seeks to hide its head in vain,
Her arrow pierces, for her aim is sure,
And Folly dies when feeling most secure.
Nor names nor titles can obtain thy smile,
For these too oft but gild the weak—the vile;
Thy vision keen, whatever the disguise,
Detects the knave and brands him ere he flies;
And in thy logic which is always clear,
When brays are heard then asses must be near.

Had ever muse—whate'r her name or fame,
A field like this wherein to seek her game?
Was ever air so filled, so black with birds?
Did ever beasts so congregate in herds?
Seize, quick, O Truth, thy rifle and let fly!
Come, sportsmen, and see "Modern Statesmen" die.

Rome fell, but need I here repeat the tale?
The theme is thread-bare and the story stale;
Ten centuries of time her glory fills,
As proudly seated on her seven hills,
Her arms triumphant, as her word was law,
Invincible, she held the world in awe.
Still might she sit, as proudly as of yore,
Still sit enthroned and count her glories o'er
Had Cæsar lived, or, dying, left a race
Of statesmen like him; but, alas! the place
Was filled—was filled? Alas, God help her, no!
Was *occupied*, and only that so-so,
By tyrants, traitors, and yet worse than all,
By *little men*—to these Rome owes her fall.
And History enacts, so says the sage,
The ancient drama on a modern stage:
The scene is changed, the place is not the same,
The strutting actors only changed in name:
Augustus reigns—see Rome in splendor rise!
Domitian rules and all her glory dies.
Great Washington in weakness founds a State,
Protects and nurses 'till men hail her great,
Successive years approve, applaud the plan,
Confirm the wisdom of that peerless man,
And when resplendently her glories shine,
And Freedom crushed, just lifts her form divine,
Great God, a Johnson with his drunken leers
Sets back the glorious tide a hundred years!
Hold up the pictures and the two contrast!
Behold the mighty first, then see the last:
The first by nature fashioned, born to rule,
The last designed and born to be a fool.

In every breast Ambition lights its fire;
A man the callow boy would be—his sire
Would wreak himself on politics or rhyme,
And be the Pitt or Milton of his time.
Despising these, he sees his favorite star
Shine red and fitful through the clouds of war,
For gory fields exchanges peace and home
And barters life for glory and a tomb;
Or worse, returns again unscarred, unhearsed,
A blundering Burnside or a Butler cursed.
Where lofty spires proclaim the city proud
There doth it move among the eager crowd;
Far off, the hills among, in hamlets rude,
Its trumpet voice disturbs the solitude.
Mark yonder lad who not ten leagues away
From home had ever dared or wished to stray
Leap at the sound and then with flashing eye
Go forth, he scarce himself knows whence or why.
Lured by Ambition, which has since the flood
Drenched the wide universe with tears and blood.
The fabled song from charmed Capræa's isle
Ne'er wooed its victims with so subtle wile.
The ears of monarchs tingle at its breath,
And at its whisper e'en remorseless death
Starts back afraid and hears the destined corse
Some Richard shriek "My kingdom for a horse!"
It breathes of conquest and revenge and, lo!
An Empire steeped in misery and woe;
A crown a madman's foot-ball and a throne
No beggar yet so poor would call his own.
See where Bellona rides her horrid car,
Her steeds encrimsoned by the the tide of war:

See those fair plains where once in merry dance
The happy peasant moved; alas, see France!
See how Ambition with a tyrant's slaves
Can desolate and ridge a land with graves.
Ah, see how poor and pitiless she lies,
With gaping wounds and supplicating eyes.
Poor France! no statesman there to heal her woes,
Or stay the ravage of her victor foes.

But not of crowns and coronets alone
Doth mad Ambition build its reeking throne:
Not over seas where despots hold in thrall
The groaning millions waiting for their fall;
Not there alone it points its polished dart
And hurls it hissing to its victim's heart.
See how e'en here and at your very doors,
Aspiring Websters crowd your Senate floors;
See how Ambition mars the plans of fate,
And lifts a tailor to the chair of state;
How blear-eyed bruisers enter quick the lists,
Renounce their muscle and resign their fists;
Forsake the Ring, and then in field less gory,
Pursue an office and the bauble glory.
See how it rising soars from blameless coats
To "Fame's proud temple" through *repeated* votes,
And paints for him whose bent or broken nose
Proclaims his combats with a hundred foes,
A seat in Congress, and to fill the plan,
The unique glory of the self-made man.

As some contagion vile with noxious breath
Taints all the air with pestilence and death,
So rage for office glows on every side,
And hastes to ruin with resistless stride:
For, not elsewhere as in this favored land
Do gain and glory travel hand in hand.
Ambitious paupers shuffle off their cares,
For once officials, they are millionaires,
And clearly demonstrate how in our day
Enormous incomes spring from little pay.
A splendid palace rears its gilded walls
For whilom tenants of "ancestral halls,"
Whose scant dimensions, six or eight by nine,
Were shared in common with their kindred swine.
A gaudy equipage with arms ablaze
Speaks not less loudly of the altered days
Of him who shone the master of his art—
The blood-stained hero of a butcher's cart.

And, pray, who would not spurn such menial toils
And shine a statesman for a statesman's spoils?
Who with crossed legs would sit and eke out life,
The unknown hero of ignoble strife?
Who would stand forth and hold his precious eyes
A buffer's target for a paltry prize?

In every hell that opens to the town
As bar-room heroes do they win renown,
For Rumor here lets loose her hundred tongues,
Then mounts the house tops and with iron lungs
Recounts, with epithets at rivals hurled,

Their loathsome triumphs to a listening world.
Stories obscene they spice with bawdy wit
Which even brothels would declare unfit;
But here, admiring listeners fill each pause
With shouts of laughter and with loud applause.
They talk of measures as they talk of men,
Make wise predictions—tell just where and when
Events momentous will convulse the State,
Their rise and progress, and as well their fate;
Give in detail the history of their lives,
And, if encouraged, also of their wives;
And what to them are trifles light as air—
Domestic secrets—here are all laid bare.
Without or qualm or blush they e'en recount
How votes were purchased and for what amount;
How ballots never cast were counted in,
And tricks and frauds enabled them to win.
Rehearse the story, never twice the same,
How gold and silver paved their way to fame.
Mellowed by wine, more voluble become,
Offer their services and name the sum;
Disclose their secret schemes to rob the state,
The risks mere trifles and the plunder great;
Till when at last they sink, themselves o'ercome,
Their sober auditors convey them home.

The starving scribblers who pursue their trade
Indite or sell them speeches ready made;
They curse one party, and then e'en as well
Consign the other to the lowest hell;
Talk large and loud about affairs of state,

Now praise, now blame, now laud and now berate ;
" Villain" and "traitor" and like gentle words
Come flying thick and fast as summer birds ;
And when completed and received their pay,
They damn their patron on another day.
Then see these statesmen on the senate floor,
With purchased speeches how they rave and roar ;
How in mid-air they toss their arms around,
And stamp and shout, and then the table pound ;
Fling books and inkstands for their telling hits,
And roll their eyes as men do when in fits.
At foreign diplomats then hurl their bolts,
And dub them minions, hirelings, slaves and dolts ;
Revile their sovereigns and then threaten war,
Laugh at the ribbon, ridicule the star ;
With lavish hand then feed their favorite bird
With awful adjectives and phrase absurd :
Tell kings and queens to lift their tyrant's eye
To where the soaring eagle sweeps the sky ;
Then talk like jockeys of his splendid points,
His beak, his talons and his iron joints—
Picture his habits and his fiery blood
And tell how monarchs are his favorite food.

Ye youth obscure who look with longing eyes
On these, the statesmen who have won the prize,
Let fierce ambition fire your slumbering soul,
Then seek the way and onward to the goal !
Let not the devious, dark and winding path,
Nor yet the thunder of a rivals wrath
Turn backward him whose practiced eye can trace

The glittering glories that attend on place;
Let loose the dogs and scour the open field,
First find the game, then follow 'till it yield;
Urge on the hounds till caps are thrown in air
And victory hails her new-born son and heir!
On genius trample 'till it hides its head—
Its fires extinguished and its glory dead,
And crowned at last with laurel and with bay
You learn e'en brutes and bullies have their day.

O, laggard Justice, timid, halting, blind,
Thy victims run before—thou, far behind;
Cast off thy burdens and with nimble foot
Leap o'er the ground and hasten the pursuit;
Strike down these plunderers—these public thieves,
And strew their carcasses like autumn leaves.
Halt not, but haste thee, strike them as they fly,
And let them feel keen torture ere they die.
When stricken down, at last, when brought to bay
Let dogs devour and wolves consume their prey.
But Charity, mild-eyed, forgiving, kind,
Ingenious ever an excuse to find,
Imploring Justice to withhold her spear,
For such as these e'en drops the pitying tear,
And points to others more degraded still,
The loathsome cause of every public ill:
Their sneaking tempters who with lies and gold
Pursue their victims 'till they're bought and sold.
Behold this modern devil as he crawls,
Half snake, half man—he rises and then falls;
From toothless jaws he darts his forked tongue

And spits and hisses as he rolls along;
Small, twinkling eyes no mortal e'er has seen,
Look where they are, and lo there eyes have been!
He smiles and fawns, sees all, hears every sound,
And when alarmed lies close along the ground:
There plotting mischief 'till his fear is gone
Again he rises and his work goes on,
Pours honied words into his victims' ear
'Till charmed the most reluctant pause to hear:
And e'en while listening to the pleasing sound,
Entwines his helpless victims round and round;
Encircled and confined with bands of steel—
Bands which nor heat nor fire can e'er anneal,
Fainting they turn and gasping as they bleed
Behold the hideous monster Thurlow Weed.

Go ask of him why Bribery stalks abroad
Erects her altar and proclaims her god?
Why Crime and fell Corruption, hand in hand
Lift up their brazen front and curse the land?
Why, horror-stricken from his snares and toils
Virtue retires and Intellect recoils?
And yet there are who tremble at his name,
Who deem that Weed and Virtue are the same;
Who bow and cringe and think themselves the while
Too happy only to secure his smile:
Liken this reptile, crawling on his belly
To Talleyrand and e'en to Machiavelli!
Alas, poor hapless, hopeless, blinded tools
E'en while admiring, they're despised as fools!

As one who, sheltered from the wintry blast
By his own hearth recalls the summer past;
Dwells on each pleasing scene with moistening eye—
The lake, the mountain and the smiling sky;
The field, gold-crowned and glorious in the sun:
The long, glad days, too brief when they are done;
Then looks abroad upon the leafless wood:
The barren fields where waving harvests stood;
The rolling mead, now bleak and brown and bare;
The dun, cold clouds that darken all the air:
Where'er he casts his weary eyes around
Sees summer's wreck encumbering the ground;
So backward glance and from the golden time
When yet a nation gloried in its prime;
From scenes which charmed coy Fancy from her cell;
From halls where Eloquence once loved to dwell;
Where hung engarlanded her matchless flowers,
And Wit disported with the dallying Hours;
Where Clay once thrilled a rapt and breathless throng—
The peerless orator—born son of song;
Where Webster thundered, and with flashing eye
Hurled lightning at the traitor doomed to die;
Where Hayne, proud son of Hermes, waved his wand
And swift enchantment bound a willing land;
From these go see, ye gods! the pigmy crew
Who rule the State, and ruling, ruin too;
The mighty statesmen who are growing gray
In drawing mileage and their daily pay;
Who comprehend, and solve too, at a glance,
This all-absorbing question of finance;
See how they mimic in their little way
The brawny giants of another day!

And first behold among the brilliant throng,
*The mighty Stevens as he limps along:
See how the minnows quiver, shake and quail
And clear the way for this tremendous whale:
Gods what a front and gods with what an air
This arch-fanatic seeks his waiting chair!
How roll his eyes to catch the servile smiles
Of fawning worshippers who crowd the aisles!
How buz the galleries 'till 'tis whispered round
Great Thaddeus himself is on the ground!
How all with hope and expectation big
On tip-toe rise to view that famous wig!
Lauded by friends and roundly cursed by foes,
All, all admire, and why God only knows!
A briefless lawyer at a country bar
He sprang to notice in a wordy war,
There poured such torrents of envenomed bile
And crowned his foes with epithets so vile,
Admiring bumpkins seized upon his name
And bore it upwards to the heights of Fame.
Brow-beating bully as he first was known,
Brow-beating bully has he ever shone,
And this the sum of all he knows to-day
To hurl an epithet and draw his pay.
Yes, more than this, for though his face is sour
He'll make you laugh and giggle by the hour;
And once the cap and bells upon his head,
His jokes might tickle e'en the sleeping dead!
But if you'd see displayed his brightest wit
Just toss a burly negro in the pit;

* The lines following, and relating to this *great* Statesman, were written previous to his death.

Then hold your sides and then prepare to roar,
Silence all lesser fools, for Stevens has the floor.
The jokes so quickly and so thickly come,
You'd swear that Africa had been his home;
There grown familiar with her fragrant sons,
Here coins his knowledge into roaring puns.
And thus, whate'er may be his varying mood,
He'll stamp and rave or make you jokes as good:
Disdaining custom and defying rule,
The clown of Congress and the Nation's fool!
Whate'er the theme or subject of debate
He'll laugh it down, or, failing, grow irate,
Then, gods of Hellas, how he cracks his whip!
His frightened followers, how they leap and skip!
Beg loud for mercy on their bended knees,
Prepared to worship so they only please!
A statesman? Tell me when he helped the State,
What has he planned, what done to make her great?
Where is the monument whose towering head
Shall tell his deeds when he who wrought is dead?
What splendid project has he e'er designed?
What brilliant scheme to elevate mankind?
Where stands recorded on the burning page
The eloquence which thrills and moves the age?
The uttered wisdom and the thoughts sublime
Which lift the soul and triumph over time?

Next see—but no, for even Satire's self
Would lay the sickening theme upon the shelf
And say, retiring, "let the curtain fall,
For seeing one you e'en have seen them all."

Untraveled and unread, their narrow mind
Hampered by prejudice—by self confined,
Knowing no other and desiring none,
Sees but one country, and that one their own.
The splendid lights which stream from ancient Rome,
Freedom's own birthplace and her pristine home;
The deeds of glory which have made her name
Sound longest, loudest in the trump of Fame:
The lessons taught by Empires in decay
Which strew the years like mile-stones on the way,
For *these* are naught but sights and sounds of dread
Voices from tombs and shadows of the dead.
For *them* in vain Horatius stemmed the tide
The stake his country and his country's pride—
Changed yellow Tiber to the deepest red
And piled the bridge with heaps of foemen dead:
Turned then triumphant from the scene of blood,
Leaped in the stream and swam the angry flood.
In vain did Mucius show a tyrant King
That fire and flame for heroes have no sting—
Though arms may wither—hands in ashes fall—
The soul unconquered, triumphs over all.
In vain, O. Sparta, did thy chosen band
Fight for the Pass and for their native land—
Lie down in death to check, retard the foe
Who hastened on to strike the fatal blow.
To rise unselfish and to laugh at fate,
To fight, and failing, *die* to save a State—
To them, these are but fictions, fancies wild,
Or e'en at best but tales that please a child.

The undying thoughts of every clime and age
For them illumine the immortal page;
Wit, eloquence, philosophy and song
Shine first and foremost in the splendid throng;
And standing near to these and just behind
The Arts that elevate and bless mankind.
Learning's rich treasures and her musty spoils—
Records of heart-ache and unending toils—
To these their golden gates fling open wide
And show the temple where the gods abide.

They enter in, and having looked about,
Are soon disgusted and are sooner out—
Like not the place, the occupants, the air,
And make objections to the bill of fare;
Displeased with this—turn up their nose at that—
These viands are too lean, and these too fat:
The wines too new, or if not new, too sour—
They swear they'll not remain another hour:
Declare the Grecian roots too tough by far,
And wish them buried with the Trojan war;
The Latin nonsense and the Roman schools
They deem, at best, but nurseries of fools;
Wish Socrates had either lost his tongue
Or drank the hemlock while he yet was young;
Thus cared for Plato ne'er had racked his brain
In foolish hopes to make his master plain;
Curse Homer, and all other singing Greeks,
And deem their songs, at best, but crazy freaks;
Are much surprised that Tully should so whine
About a renegade like Cataline;

But more surprised by far that what he said
Should find a publisher and now be read.
Livy they looked on as an arrant liar,
And toss his fables in the nearest fire.

And, so, ye men of Greece and Rome behold!
You are for these some centuries too old;
Your logic muddled, and your fables stale,
They laugh at you and at your language rail;
Think robes and togas for an antique sage
Were well when robes and togas were the rage;
But sneer at garments cut like these to-day,
Glance at you once, then turn their eyes away.

Of men more modern—men of later date,
They talk the longest and the loudest prate;
Imbibe the wisdom and adopt the style
Of Victor Hugo, or of Tom Carlyle,
And hide, like them, while peoples wink and laugh,
A grain of wheat beneath an Alps of chaff.
Attain to statecraft in the modern way,
By first inquiring "will this project pay?"
Then welcome tariff and begone free trade,
Or duty off and tariff in the shade!
With silly schemes whose number foots a score,
They build Utopias with Sir Thomas More:
And learn their maxims from some venial sheet,
Or else from brawlers who harangue the street.

Poor shallow fools, they never stop to think
That not from fountains but from streams they drink—

Streams thick and muddy and some miles away
From where they rise and sparkle into day.
With draughts drawn thence in a resistless flood
Along their veins would leap the crimson blood;
Health paint their cheeks and light their eyes with fire
Till men would envy and the gods admire.
To save their country from all threatened harm,
Like ancient athletes wield the brawny arm,
Pursue her foes (and e'en would make them feel),
With limbs as supple as the bending steel.
With cunning hand then build the growing State
In fair proportion as designed by Fate;
On broad foundations would the structure rise
Until its spires should pierce the arching skies;
Its graceful columns and its towering walls
Stand sentinel before its spacious halls;
There sturdy Strength with witching Beauty try
And Art with Science for the victory vie.
Beneath its dome the oppressed of all the earth,
Of every clime, whate'er their name of birth,
Would find a shelter from the biting blast,
And thank their God that here was home at last!

And such, my country, might thy future be:
Such glories crown, such splendors wait on thee—
E'en more than Greece, than Rome has ever been,
The noblest fabric that the world has seen;
And Prophecy has kept the half untold,
If men like these thy destiny controlled.

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